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EDITORIAL

THE VALUE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

What comes to your mind when you hear the term “servant leadership?” Some may think about Jesus and His profound teachings, while for others, Greenleaf and his leadership legacy come to mind. Nonetheless, this concept has been discussed extensively in both the church and secular circles. A good example of this is shown in the massive systematic review of servant leadership articles by Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendonck, and Linen (2019). These researchers gathered 285 articles on servant leadership written across the last 20 years alone.

There are a number of definitions of the term “servant leadership,” yet this concept still appears to have loose ends. On the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership webpage, you will notice this statement: “Servant leadership is a philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, builds better organizations, and ultimately creates a more just and caring world.”

Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) further polished the definition by describing servant leadership as:

. . . a leadership philosophy in which the main goal of the leader is to serve. This is different from traditional leadership where the leader's main focus is the thriving of their company or organizations. A Servant Leader shares power, puts the needs of the employees first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 57-64)

Yet how do you know if you are servant leader? Is it merely a desire in your heart to be a servant leader? Is there a way to measure servant leadership qualities?

Some colleges and universities offer a servant leadership certificate. You can receive the certificate by passing five online courses in three months. That simple. Each recipient can then proudly say, “I am a servant leader, and now I

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have a certificate to prove it.” One might wonder if a university can truly develop leadership character in three months. What exactly does it mean to be a servant leader? How do you recognize one? Can servant leadership be taught or developed in a certification course?

I recently read the story (Jennings, n.d.) of a member of a hospital board of trustees who oversaw hospitals across the southeastern region of the U.S. One of the hospital’s CEOs was struggling with a surgeon playing hardball. The surgeon was the hospital’s top revenue producer and knew it, which made negotiating with him extremely difficult.

The trustee decided to visit the surgeon at his home. There he quickly discovered that this doctor’s dog was his life. The dog had free rein of the house while they met; pictures of the dog hung on the walls. The trustee spent much of the time talking to the surgeon about his own passion for dogs. The men also discussed the surgeon’s demands and found a way to reach an agreement. At the end of the visit, the surgeon thanked the trustee for taking the time to come to his home.

When asked if the hospital CEO had ever visited his medical practice, the answer was: “Never.” Had the CEO had ever visited his home? “Nope.” The only contact the surgeon had with the hospital CEO was when he went to the CEO’s office for a required meeting.

Later, when the trustee asked the CEO if he had ever visited the surgeon in his medical practice, a different picture emerged: “Regularly.” He also claimed that he had been to the surgeon’s house. “What’s his dog’s name?” Of course, the CEO didn’t know. He didn’t even know the surgeon had a dog. When you see people only as a resource to manage rather than a human being to serve, you sometimes do not even see the obvious things right in front of your eyes (Jennings, n.d.).

Greenleaf’s basic axiom of servant leadership that we are servants who lead, not leaders who serve, still stands tall. In the context of Christian leadership, I find this thought profound. It takes courage to be a servant first. Some church leaders need their office and role to hide their insecurities. It is likely that we all fall into that trap at sometime or another. Leading in the face of uncertainty can be difficult. So we use our leadership role as a shield for our anxiety. As you can imagine, when you lead from a place of insecurity, it affects the church. Your impact as a leader is simply not as great as when you lead as a servant who has a balanced sense of self-confidence rooted in who you truly are. Am I a *doulos Christou* [slave/servant of Christ] as Paul repeatedly introduces himself in his epistles or am I just a certified leader entitled to lead?

While there may be no way to truly determine the state of a person’s heart or measure servant leadership, there are ways to enhance successful servant

leadership in your own life and realm of influence. In reflecting upon servant leadership, Maxwell (2018) concluded that it is vital not to rely on position or title to gain respect; instead, he recommended earning respect by delivering on what was promised and serving others with humility. He also suggested that a way for a leader to measure success is by adding value to others (Maxwell, 2018). When you decide to serve others as a leader, the team's success becomes your success. Few things are more gratifying than helping your team to win together.

As you read this issue of the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, I believe you will come to appreciate the value of servant leadership in the Christian leadership community and at large.

This issue of *JACL* opens with an article by Carlo Serrano which examines the story in Acts 15. This biblical account provides Christian leaders with an example of ethical and strategic decision-making, as well as giving insight into how the Holy Spirit is active in organizational leadership. Through the process modeled by leaders in the early church, Serrano offers an example of how they wrestled with potentially destructive problems and worked towards solutions that brought the church together.

This article is followed by an interview with Thom Wolf, the president of global studies of the University Institute, New Delhi, India. Wolf candidly shares his experiences and observations on the positive impact that being “another kind” of Christian—and leader—can have when working in a different culture to one's own.

The three feature articles look at servant leadership from three different perspectives. Jacques Doukhan, an Old Testament and Hebrew scholar, unveils a pearl of insight. Do you know that “leader” is at the root of the first Hebrew word in the Bible? In English, it takes three words to convey the same thought: “In the beginning.” The implications for servant leadership found in the Creation account is well worth your time to read.

A topic that is coming more and more to the forefront of consciousness for Christian leaders is that of safety. In his article entitled “Places of Worship: Leadership Influence on Threat Vulnerability,” Joel Bigley presents a method of mitigating risk called a “risk register;” this system can be used to minimize vulnerabilities in places of worship and models how to minimize the probability of exploitation.

Jeff Singfiel encourages organizations to train leaders in servant leadership, evaluate for servant leader characteristics, and build the necessary relationships that mediate servanthood.

Authors Petr Cincala and Jerry Chase take an in-depth look at empirical data correlating the health and growth of churches with different types of

leaders—including those who implement servant leadership. The results of their research are sure to surprise you.

Finally, Kelvin Onongha adds a healthy sting as he tackles the issue of spirituality and sexuality in the context of Christian leadership. Onongha stresses the importance of providing structures, programs, and support for our leaders to keep them from falling into the trap of sexual sins.

This issue concludes with a series of book reviews, dissertation abstracts, and a special program review—all of which are meant to keep you up to date and informed with some of the latest research, writing, and programs in the field of leadership.

We hope the articles will provide you with a thought-provoking hour for self-reflection for your next strategic stop.

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